

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

In the Matter of:

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DCA-03-MM-036

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Thursday,
June 19, 2003

INTERVIEW OF:

TAMARA BUELL

PRESENT:

BOB FORD
LIEUTENANT GILMORE
BILL WOODY
KENNETH LAWRENSON

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 MR. FORD: Okay. It is June 19, it is 10:35
3 in the morning. My name is Bob Ford. I am with the
4 National Transportation Safety Board. I will have the
5 others around the table introduce themselves.

6 MR. WOODY: Bill Woody, Safety Board.

7 MR. LAWERSON: Ken Lawerson, with the Coast
8 Guard in Portland.

9 LIEUTENANT GILMORE: Lieutenant Gilmore, Chief
10 Investigation of Portland.

11 MR. FORD: For the record, I need you to state
12 your name.

13 MS. BUELL: Tamara Buell.

14 MR. FORD: And do you prefer to be called
15 Tammy?

16 MS. BUELL: Tamara.

17 MR. FORD: Okay. That is fine.

18 I know you have been interviewed once. And I
19 am sure you have almost talked out on what has
20 happened. And you probably trying not to think about
21 it, much less to continue to talk. And I didn't bring
22 you back here just to make your life miserable, or
23 painful. We are just trying to find out what happened.
24 And I am sorry I couldn't be a part of the first
25 interview. I was down on another accident in Miami, so

1 I was flying here on Sunday. I am not going to ask you
2 about life jackets, or the ordeal you went through
3 after the boat capsized. What I want is just some
4 information maybe which happened from the time you left
5 the dock until the time the boat actually capsized.
6 So, if you could just give me just a quick run through
7 as to leaving the dock, and at a certain point where
8 either you stayed on the aft deck, went up on the
9 flying bridge, just things like that.

10 MS. BUELL: Okay. So, when we left the dock?

11 MR. FORD: Right.

12 MS. BUELL: Okay. So, we left the dock, and
13 we were motoring out behind somebody, I don't know who
14 it was. Nothing was different than normal. We got
15 out, I was talking to Doug, I think I was standing on
16 the side and talking to him while he was driving. And
17 then I saw the bar, and I said, oh, wow, this is going
18 to be fun. And he said, yeah. And then, I went back
19 to the back deck and talked to the customers a little
20 bit. And I got something to drink and went up and sat
21 with Doug. And we just motored around. We would pull
22 up by the north jetty, and idle there for a little bit
23 and he kind of, you know, put in gear a couple of times
24 to go into the wave, and then keep us away from the
25 jetty and then we would start getting kind of close to

1 the jetty, so he would take us out and around in a big
2 circle. We kind of just putt back towards the port and
3 just kind of watching over our shoulders as that was
4 going on. And then come back up by the north jetty
5 again and the D&D was doing the same thing.

6 And then we saw the Norwester go, and he
7 called back and it was like he went over a couple real
8 big ones. And he called back and all the customers
9 were watching this and Tron called back and said, you
10 know, it was pretty rough, so, you might as well just
11 wait. It is better to wait. And then about five
12 minutes later, about 10 minutes later Steve on the
13 Oakland Pilot went. And it looked like he took a
14 couple of big ones, too. And then when he got out, he
15 called back and said, we had dodge a log, and he broke
16 his window. Somebody had said from the inside out
17 later. But, I didn't know that then.

18 So, he said, yeah, there is a lot of logs
19 floating out there. And then we waited some more. And
20 the D&D went out and that looked like from where I was
21 sitting, it looked like it had a pretty good ride out,
22 and I didn't see it take any big ones. I guess it did
23 a little bit later, but I didn't see it.

24 So, we went up to the edge, you know, right
25 about where the D&D was sitting, right before they went

1 in, right where everybody kind of sits before they go.

2 And we sat there for a couple of seconds and there
3 was, from what I remember, most of the passengers were
4 on the back deck, sitting down but there were a few
5 standing up, so I turned back and said, okay, everybody
6 sit down and then he went. And then kind of motored
7 out, we were about in front of the north jetty, and
8 then it started getting bigger waves instead of
9 smaller. And he said, I didn't want to get into this.

10 And then we took the first big wave and throttled back
11 and put it in reverse at the top of the wave, came back
12 over it, so that we wouldn't flap the other side. And
13 at that point, that is when I noticed that the back had
14 started to turn a little bit and then when we came down
15 on the other side of the waves, the back started
16 swinging around and Doug was doing something with the
17 throttles and the wheel. And I don't, I don't know
18 which way he was turning or what, if he had it in
19 forward or reverse. I thought he had it in forward,
20 but I can't be positive about that.

21 And we just ended up completely sideways to
22 it. We were facing pretty much north and the wave was
23 just kind of at our port side. And I remember it was
24 revving up really loud, so he was probably trying to go
25 out wherever he was going. And I was watching the

1 waves, so I didn't see if there was anything that he
2 was trying to do. And then it hit us. And we just
3 went straight over.

4 MR. FORD: From what I understand, you were
5 trying to train, to get a captain licence, is that
6 true?

7 MS. BUELL: Yes.

8 MR. FORD: So, when you go out with these
9 captains, obviously they help you along, train you and
10 it is not just, you are just not a deck hand, go take
11 care of this, go take, you are trying to learn.

12 MS. BUELL: Well --

13 MR. FORD: Correct?

14 MS. BUELL: Yes, I am trying to learn. I
15 wouldn't say, unless I ask them about something
16 particular, I wouldn't say that they are sitting there
17 trying to train me, but, yeah, I remember thinking as
18 we went over the first wave, I was holding on, I yelled
19 back to everybody to hold on, because I knew it was
20 going to be a big one and I was holding on and when he
21 backed up at the top of the wave, I remember thinking,
22 well, that is a good idea, because I don't know if I
23 would have thought of it. I would have thought of
24 bringing the throttle back, but I wouldn't have thought
25 of backing up on it. But, it really helped so that we

1 didn't fly out there and crash down. And, and --

2 MR. FORD: At that point what direction, was
3 the boat facing west or had you started to --

4 MS. BUELL: We had started --

5 MS. BUELL: We had started to turn.

6 MR. FORD: Started to turn to the north.

7 MS. BUELL: Yes. We could have took the wave,
8 we didn't take it straight on, we took it a little bit
9 of an angle, but not a big angle.

10 MR. FORD: Okay. And which way did the stern
11 start to swing, when you thought he was going stern?
12 You said the stern started to swing --

13 MS. BUELL: Yeah, it started to swing to the
14 port.

15 MR. FORD: It did swing to the port.

16 MS. BUELL: Yes.

17 MR. FORD: Okay.

18 MS. BUELL: I mean, we were already kind of
19 faced that way. We were coming over the wave, instead
20 of going straight into it like this, we were kind of
21 coming at it like a bit of an angle. So, when we got
22 to the top, and we kind of backed up, we started to
23 swing a little bit and then when we came down, we
24 started to swing more.

25 MR. FORD: Okay. Now, when did he go on the

1 flying bridge, right from the beginning, from the
2 marina or --

3 MS. BUELL: Yeah, he takes off from there
4 because he can see when you take out of the split, you
5 have to be able to see, so he stayed up there.

6 MR. FORD: And when did you go on the flying
7 bridge?

8 MS. BUELL: I actually went on the flying
9 bridge once we got out there and we were motoring
10 around and I came down and got something to drink and
11 then I came, I went back up. I think I, I think I came
12 down twice, I think I got some -- or something and I
13 was talking to the customers, just kind of chatting,
14 you know. And then I went back up there because I kind
15 of like to see what is going on and help out if I can.

16 MR. FORD: Okay.

17 MS. BUELL: Looking for anything, you know.

18 MR. FORD: Did you hear any VHF transmissions?

19 MS. BUELL: The one from Tron, when he went
20 across, and the one from Steve, I don't remember if we
21 talked to Bob at all.

22 MR. FORD: Okay. And, and Steve definitely
23 said there were logs in the water.

24 MS. BUELL: He said he had to dodge a log.

25 MR. FORD: Had to dodge a log.

1 MS. BUELL: Yes. I think he had actually
2 called Tron, before either one of them went out, and
3 said something about the logs floating by the north
4 jetty.

5 MR. FORD: So, you were standing up and on the
6 flying bridge, as soon as you left the breakwater.

7 MS. BUELL: I was sitting on the bench.

8 MR. FORD: Sitting on the bench and does that
9 give you a good view over the bough?

10 MS. BUELL: Pretty good. I mean, as good as
11 you are going to get.

12 MR. FORD: Could you see any debris in the
13 water?

14 MS. BUELL: I didn't notice any. You mean
15 when we very first started out or when we were there?

16 MR. FORD: As soon as you, as soon as he
17 thought he saw hole and when --

18 MS. BUELL: I didn't notice it.

19 MR. FORD: You didn't see any debris.

20 MS. BUELL: Okay.

21 MR. FORD: Okay. When you are up there, when I
22 was a cadet, what I used to do, is I would be on the
23 bridge, and I would watch the captain or pilot, and I
24 would always think in my own mind, let's say if I was
25 in a river, what would do I now? Do you, would you do

1 that, something like that if you were up on the flying
2 bridge, try to, not outguess them, but try to
3 anticipate what he may do?

4 MS. BUELL: Yes.

5 MR. FORD: Did you do it that morning?

6 MS. BUELL: Yes.

7 MR. FORD: So, you are looking at the set, the
8 rolls coming in, the swells, could you see a hole, did
9 you feel that there was a hole?

10 MS. BUELL: Well, I thought that it still
11 looked rough, but, I had watched when Bob went out and
12 he had started out when it was still rough, because I
13 understand that you have to get both, let's see, both
14 Tron and I don't remember whether Steve said it, but I
15 remember Tron saying it on the radio, he had said that
16 he kept seeing openings, but by the time he got there,
17 it wasn't an opening anymore. So, I was understanding
18 that you had to start out when it didn't look good,
19 when you are just anticipating an opening. And I
20 hadn't seen one, but I assumed that Doug had been
21 watching closer than me, and had noticed that, okay,
22 there is going to be one here real soon.

23 MR. FORD: Okay. Now you have made a number
24 of trips out there. I know that was discussed in the
25 previous interview. Would you say you were at about

1 the same distance off the north jetty you normally
2 would go or further out, further in, or the same?

3 MS. BUELL: It seemed like we were in a little
4 closer.

5 MR. FORD: Closer. Okay.

6 And --

7 MS. BUELL: but, it was hard to tell.

8 MR. FORD: Okay.

9 MS. BUELL: I looked back at it when we went
10 over the first wave, and it may have pushed us back
11 further, so maybe that is why it seemed closer, but,
12 but when we first started going, it seemed about
13 normal. I think maybe like where you turn, he had to
14 turn a little bit, so it pushed us over closer.

15 MR. FORD: Could you just, a guesstimate, it
16 doesn't have to be perfect, about how many times you
17 have been, gone out in similar conditions?

18 MS. BUELL: In similar conditions.

19 MR. FORD: Right.

20 (Pause.)

21 MR. FORD: That is okay, if you --

22 MS. BUELL: Ten to 20 times, maybe.

23 MR. FORD: Ten to 20, that is good.

24 MS. BUELL: Okay.

25 MR. FORD: That is good. And who do you

1 normally are you mate for, deck hand for?

2 MS. BUELL: For the last three years, my
3 brother, Tron.

4 MR. FORD: Okay.

5 MS. BUELL: And this year, my dad.

6 MR. FORD: Okay. And so since you have seen
7 all three, would you say are there any minor
8 differences that they would depart the jetty area at or
9 were you pretty much --

10 MS. BUELL: You mean differences in close they
11 get?

12 MR. FORD: That or anything else, maybe
13 speeds, or how they --

14 MS. BUELL: Well, yeah, I mean, I usually went
15 on the Norwester, so obviously it is a lot quicker. So
16 he would make kind of different decisions based on the
17 speed of his boat.

18 MR. FORD: And he would get through the area
19 much quicker than --

20 MS. BUELL: Would than a slower boat, yes.

21 MR. FORD: Okay.

22 MS. BUELL: I mean, the faster you get through
23 it, the better.

24 MR. FORD: Okay. I have heard, it said that
25 you felt the boat hit bottom. I don't want to put

1 words in your mouth, that is not true.

2 MS. BUELL: That is not true.

3 MR. FORD: That is not true. Okay. You did
4 not make, the boat did not hit bottom.

5 MS. BUELL: I did not feel that.

6 MR. FORD: You did not feel that.

7 MS. BUELL: I felt the waves hit.

8 MR. FORD: Okay.

9 MS. BUELL: And I hit bottom.

10 MR. FORD: You hit bottom.

11 MS. BUELL: Yes.

12 MR. FORD: Maybe that is what -- Okay. And
13 the sea, itself, the swells, did it kind of lift and
14 pick it up and push it over or did it land on the boat,
15 itself? Did it break on top of you?

16 MS. BUELL: It was starting to break and it
17 just slammed, it felt like it just slammed straight in
18 side ways. It didn't pick us up and roll us over. It
19 just slammed in side ways and we just went straight
20 over.

21 MR. FORD: And other than the comment that the
22 Captain, that Douglas made, did you, was there any
23 other indication that you saw, maybe a panic in his
24 eyes, or his look or demeanor?

25 MS. BUELL: I didn't look at him after the

1 first, actually after were started out. I wasn't
2 looking at him at all.

3 MR. FORD: Okay. Well, let me, Bill, I heard
4 you were in the first one. Do you have anything?

5 MR. WOODY: Right. Did you have some time
6 previously, you said the last year was with your
7 brother, Tron.

8 MS. BUELL: Tron.

9 MR. WOODY: And now with your dad. How many
10 years with Tron?

11 MS. BUELL: About three, three and a half
12 years.

13 MR. WOODY: Okay. And had you had any time
14 with Doug in the past?

15 MS. BUELL: Yes. I started with Doug.

16 MR. WOODY: And how long was that?

17 MS. BUELL: It was about a half a season.

18 MR. WOODY: About half a season.

19 MS. BUELL: Yes.

20 MR. WOODY: When you were showing us with your
21 hands how the vessel was taking the waves, just as it
22 came out of the jetties, would that the thickness of
23 the wave, the swells on your port bough?

24 MS. BUELL: Yes.

25 MR. WOODY: Okay. You said just a little bit

1 of an angle. So, that would be a little bit of an
2 angle on the port side.

3 MS. BUELL: Yes.

4 MR. WOODY: How much angle would it be, can
5 you --

6 MS. BUELL: Okay. Okay. Maybe 30 degrees.

7 MR. WOODY: Maybe 30 degrees.

8 MS. BUELL: Right. You don't think so.

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: It was 90.

10 MS. BUELL: Right. Oh, right, oh, okay.

11 Well, I am thinking this is straight on and then
12 another, I was thinking that is 40 degrees straight on.

13 MR. FORD: It brought on the bough then --

14 MS. BUELL: Okay. This is 90 degrees, okay.

15 MR. FORD: Okay.

16 MS. BUELL: Okay. Somebody --

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: On the board, it is
18 already up there.

19 MS. BUELL: Okay.

20 MR. WOODY: That is a good idea. Just draw
21 where --

22 MS. BUELL: Okay. Here is the wave and this is
23 the first wave --

24 (Pause.)

25 MS. BUELL: I would say we were knocked about

1 like that. And this is straight on. From straight
2 on, yeah, not from --

3 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: The reason I said
4 something is because I was thinking on the angle to the
5 wave, and I wanted to make sure that was clear.

6 MS. BUELL: I am not good at that.

7 MR. WOODY: So, it is quite hard to ask that
8 question.

9 You said he throttled back to the top of the
10 wave.

11 MS. BUELL: Yes.

12 MR. WOODY: As he throttled back going up the
13 wave, he lurched at the top and then you came out of
14 the backside and he, the boat scooted around or it
15 changed course to, to that was to the north heading of
16 the bough?

17 MS. BUELL: Do you want me to just like show
18 it you on the board?

19 MR. WOODY: Sure.

20 MS. BUELL: Okay.

21 MR. WOODY: Sure.

22 (Pause.)

23 MS. BUELL: So he came up on the first wave,
24 about like this, and we hit the top of the first wave
25 and as we backed up, it started to swing a little bit

1 and it came down in between the first and the second
2 wave, we were like this. And then we went like this.
3 And we were sitting inside -- That was over here more.

4 MR. FORD: Would you show me where the waves
5 started breaking at?

6 MS. BUELL: Where -- This one?

7 MR. FORD: Yeah, were it actually, when you
8 saw it breaking.

9 MS. BUELL: When I saw it breaking, it was
10 breaking right here, I mean, the top of it was starting
11 to --

12 MR. FORD: Okay. Okay.

13 MR. WOODY: During this time, do you recall
14 what the rudder was, what --

15 MS. BUELL: I have no idea.

16 MR. WOODY: Okay.

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: There isn't any --

18 MS. BUELL: No.

19 MR. WOODY: Had you seen him put the wheel one
20 way or the other?

21 MS. BUELL: I probably had, but I don't
22 remember.

23 MR. WOODY: Okay.

24 MS. BUELL: I really don't know which way it
25 was.

1 MR. WOODY: I am finished.

2 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Just a quick. You were
3 training for your license also. Had you ever taken a
4 vessel across the bar in these conditions?

5 MS. BUELL: I wouldn't say --

6 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: -- taken.

7 MS. BUELL: By myself, like with no other
8 captain onboard?

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No, with a captain
10 onboard.

11 MS. BUELL: With the captain onboard. The
12 biggest swell I probably I ever taken out in, three,
13 maybe four feet.

14 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay.

15 MS. BUELL: Nothing.

16 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That is all the
17 questions I have.

18 MR. WOODY: During the first and second wave
19 is where you -- just draw, just like up there.

20 MS. BUELL: Okay.

21 (Pause.)

22 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: And I would -- Did you
23 ask about the fallen debris.

24 MR. FORD: Yes. She did not see.

25 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: She did not see any.

1 (Pause.)

2 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You sailed as a deck
3 hand with --

4 MS. BUELL: With Doug.

5 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: With Doug.

6 MS. BUELL: Yes.

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Was he in the habit of
8 articulating his thinking as he was going along? If
9 there was a crab pot in the water, would he say, there
10 is a crab pot?

11 MS. BUELL: No.

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I am going to turn
13 left now, I am going to turn right.

14 MS. BUELL: No.

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: We are going to make --

16 MS. BUELL: Usually I would just have to wait
17 and say, what the heck is he doing? Oh, he is going to
18 do that, okay.

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay.

20 MS. BUELL: Yeah, he is pretty didn't say much
21 about that.

22 MR. FORD: Thank you very much. Like I say, I
23 am sorry to have bring you back a second time. I just
24 wanted clarify some things.

25 MS. BUELL: Okay.

1 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)